

~~WASHINGTON STAR~~

20 SEP 1974

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Inside the '40 Committee'

When the White House press corps challenged President Ford on U.S. intervention in Chile, they squeezed him into a tight little crevice between the morality and practicality of foreign policy.

That press conference produced the rare spectacle of the President of the United States admitting that we use our wealth and our might to try to control the destinies of other nations, partly because we assume our ideological foes are doing the same.

As the only newsman around who has been a member of the Forty Committee, that small offshoot of the National Security Council which approves and oversees U.S. clandestine activities abroad, it may help if I give you a report on just what goes on — and how the issues of morality sometimes conflict.

THIS IS A RUTHLESS, dirty world where, despite talk of detente, the ideological struggle never ends. So the powerful meddle constantly in the affairs of the weak — meaning, in truth, that there is no such thing as a truly independent small, weak or poor nation. For example:

The Forty Committee is told by the Director of the CIA that Russia, through Cuba, has put a thousand well-trained agents into Venezuela to try to stir up a guerrilla uprising. The Forty Committee decided to provide helicopters, communications equipment, weapons and millions of dollars — plus some "counterinsurgency" training — for Venezuela's military and police forces.

This action will be viewed by most of my readers as a legitimate intervention, for it can be construed as assistance given at the request of the legitimate Venezuelan government, which is threatened by a foreign power.

From that example of a neighbor being harassed and threatened, we move to Chile, where the mass of people are shifting leftward politically — mostly because of the greed of the local oligarchy, exploitation of resources by North Americans and the general low level of life of the masses.

It is 1964. The United States realizes that the Chilean conservatives who have helped outsiders in their plunder

of the country can no longer win. The only way to block the accession to power of avowed Marxist Salvador Allende is to give all-out support to Eduardo Frei, a Christian Democrat who in earlier times would have been unacceptable to Washington as "too leftist."

But what right does the United States have to say who gets elected in Chile? The CIA reports — accurately, most likely — that the Soviet Union is financing three Chilean newspapers which back Allende and has funneled several million dollars into the coffers of parties supporting him.

This report is justification enough for the Forty Committee to recommend that millions in U.S. funds be given to political parties, people and newspapers supporting Frei.

So Frei is elected. But in six years in office he cannot reform his friends in the oligarchy or reduce the greed of businessmen from abroad. With passion and no small measure of demagoguery, Marxist Allende has won more and more of the people.

So in the next election Allende wins the presidency.

FEARS ABOUND IN the CIA, the Defense Department, the State Department and the White House that Chile is about to become "another Cuba."

So, as President Ford has told us with no signs of guilt or regret, we pump millions in to finance, keep strong, the opposition news media and political parties.

Once Allende is under fire from the CIA-subsidized press and the politicians whom the United States is bribing, the next step comes easy. The United States moves to shut off Chile's credit at the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Export-Import Bank.

Pretty soon Chile's economy is in a mess and the natives are so restless that we might not have to bribe any generals to get a coup going. And we can say that we had nothing to do with any coup.

It is a dirty, immoral business. But we'll probably go on doing it because we think the Russians and Chinese and British and French will go on doing it.

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